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**REMARKS
BY
U.S. AMBASSADOR TO BANGLADESH DAN MOZENA
BANGLADESH BUDDHIST ASSOCIATION
HOLY KATINA CHIBARA DANA CELEBRATION
BANGLADESH BUDDHA MAHABIHAR
UTTARA, DHAKA**

OCTOBER 17, 2014

Honorable Md. Majzibul Hoque, Minister of Railways

Honorable former Minister for Industry, Dilip Barua

... and you who today receive the wonderful gift of the crimson robe ... and others who, like me, have come to witness this beautiful ceremony, whose roots go back to the time of the Buddha ...

Good afternoon.

Bangladesh is a wondrous country ...

It dazzles in so many ways ...

A few weeks ago I concluded my quest to visit all 64 districts.

I learned so much.

I learned Bangladesh is a rich mosaic of diversity.

This diversity ... this diversity of ethnicity, of religion, of culture ... enriches the beauty and magic of Bangladesh.

Truly, the greatest beauty of Bangladesh and the greatest magic of Bangladesh are the richly diverse, wonderful Bangladeshi people.

We see this beautiful diversity in the traditions of the great religions of Bangladesh: Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity.

We see this beautiful diversity today in this magnificent Holy Katina Chibara Dana celebration.

My visits to all 64 districts have shown me Bangladesh's rich religious tapestry.

We visited the ancient Buddhist ruins of Paharpur and the fabulous temples and monasteries at Bandarban and Rangamati, the Saat-Gombuj mosque in Bagerhat, the spectacular Star Mosque in Dhaka, Dhakeswari temple and other ancient Hindu sites, the chapel on the maidan in Mymensingh and other beautiful and meaningful places of worship throughout the country – especially your monastery here today.

We have seen the diversity of religions of Bangladesh.

My main impression is that Bangladeshis of different religions have lived side-by-side in harmony for hundreds of years, and they continue to live side-by-side in peace and friendship to this very day.

Everywhere I went, I saw that Bangladeshis of whatever religion have the same aspirations.

They want ... you want ... I want ... simply to build better lives for ourselves and our families so we can provide them good, safe shelter, ample, nutritious food, good healthcare and quality education.

Bangladeshis seek to live in peace and harmony.

Bangladeshis respect their neighbors and their neighbors' religious beliefs as neighbor joins neighbor in celebrating their different religious holidays and festivals.

At the national level, Bangladesh observes as a national holiday a key festival of each religion.

I know of no other nation where the President hosts a grand reception to commemorate the great feast days of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity.

Indeed, Bangladesh's constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The constitution states that, while Islam is the state religion, the nation is a secular state that "shall ensure equal status and equal rights in the practice of the Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, and other religions."

America also stands for religious freedom; it is a powerful principle whose roots go back to the very foundation of my nation.

President Obama said recently, "history shows that nations that uphold the rights of their people – including the freedom of religion – are ultimately more just and more peaceful and more successful...No society can truly succeed unless it guarantees the rights of all its peoples, including religious minorities."

Religious freedom is a universal right, a source of stability for societies, and a foundation for democratic governance.

Bangladesh, like America, values religious diversity.

In this context, attacks against religious minorities are most jarring and disturbing.

Such attacks are not in character with the spirit of Bangladesh – a spirit of tolerance, moderation, acceptance that reflects the Bangladeshi tradition of members of different religions living side-by-side in peace and harmony.

I join Bangladeshis in recalling with horror various attacks against religious minorities, including the 2012 attacks against the Buddhist communities of Ramu and elsewhere.

I was honored to be a member of the Prime Minister's delegation last year when she reviewed the government's work to rebuild the destroyed temples and monasteries.

I urge all Bangladeshis to be true to their rich tradition of tolerance and acceptance of minorities by rejecting violence and religious intolerance.

I applaud the campaign launched by UNDP and many NGOs on October 2, the International Day of Non-Violence, to generate greater public awareness of and support for Bangladesh's traditional values of social harmony and tolerance.

As I look to this nation's future, I am confident that all Bangladeshis will undertake to build on these traditional values and aspirations as they seek to build better futures for themselves and their children.

This wonderful, colorful ceremony that we are witnessing today reflects Bangladesh's respect for diversity.

I believe Bangladeshis ... whether Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, or Christian ... are determined to build and strengthen the nation's great traditions of peace and harmony, thus further uniting all Bangladeshis as they build Sonar Bangla.

Thank you.

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**As prepared for delivery*